



Swainson's Hawk PCCP Survey Protocols for Projects

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Surveys for Swainson's hawk nests are required on the following communities in the Valley, within 0.25 mile (1,320 feet) of the project site:

- Valley oak woodland
- Grassland (if trees are present)
- Riparian
- Semi-natural (if trees are present)
- Other agricultural (if trees are present)
- Rural residential (if trees are present)
- Urban (if trees are present)

Swainson's hawk (SWHA) surveys and CNDDDB record searches are required well in advance of project construction to determine whether Swainson's hawk is known to nest on or within 1,320 feet of the project site.

A complete round of planning level SWHA surveys is to be completed the year prior to project implementation for all projects subject to CEQA. If the project is minor, such as a Single-Family Dwelling that is Categorically Exempt, record searches will suffice to satisfy the Planning-level surveys. Please contact the Placer Conservation Authority (PCA) early in project planning to confirm the level of survey effort required for the project.

Additionally, **all projects with suitable nesting habitat (see list above) within 0.25 mile** are required to complete SWHA surveys during the year of construction. For projects that did not conduct Planning-level surveys, surveys will be conducted for as many survey rounds (see Survey Timing below) as feasible; a minimum of Period 1 thru 3 surveys* must be completed prior to the initiation of construction activities. If Planning-level surveys were completed and no nest trees were identified the year prior, a minimum of one survey during Period 2 must be conducted prior to initiating construction activities and it may co-align with the Preconstruction survey.

A preconstruction clearance survey must be completed for all project sites containing suitable nesting habitat and for projects that cannot be designed to avoid active Swainson's hawk nest trees if construction must occur during the nesting season (approx. February 1 – September 15).

1. Background Research and Notification

- a. Contact the Placer Conservation Authority (PCA) to confirm with the Program Biologist which areas require SWHA surveys and to inform when surveys are scheduled.
- b. Conduct CNDDDB query for SWHA and request site-specific occurrence information from the PCA.

*For certain small ministerial projects and other minor covered activities, the Program Biologist may be consulted, and based on site specific circumstances and as surrounding land uses allow, survey requirements may be adjusted accordingly with the approval of the PCA. Early consultation is recommended.

2. Survey Timing: Planning-level (year prior)

Conduct Planning-level surveys between February 1 – September 15 the year prior to project implementation (based on a modified schedule within CDFW 2000 SWHA Guidelines):

- a. Period 2: March 20 – April 5 (Sunrise to 1000 and/or 1600 to sunset)
2 survey rounds for detecting nest building, SWHA courtship behavior, early nesting
- b. Period 3: April 5 – April 20 (Sunrise to 1200 and/or 1630 to Sunset)
2 survey rounds for detecting active nesting
- c. Period 4: April 21 – June 10 (known nests only)
1 survey round for detecting active nesting – most hawks should be established nesting by this period.
- d. Period 5: June 10 – July 30 (known nests only; Sunrise to 1200 and/or 1600 to Sunset)
1 survey round to observe post-fledging success or failure
- e. If a SWHA nest is located and presence confirmed during one of the above survey rounds, only 1 follow-up visit is required to minimize nest disturbance and confirm continued occupancy.
- f. If a nest tree is identified during the planning-level surveys and is planned for removal, early consultation with the PCA and CDFW will begin on removal of that tree outside of the nesting season.

3. Survey Timing: Year of Implementation

- a. Period 1: January – March 20 = 1 survey round for existing stick nests
If planning-level surveys have been completed, the Period 1 survey is optional.
- b. Period 2: March 20 – April 5 (Sunrise to 1000 and/or 1600 to sunset)
2 survey rounds for detecting nest building, SWHA courtship behavior, early nesting;
If planning-level surveys have been completed, only 1 survey round is required.
- c. Period 3: April 5 – April 20 (Sunrise to 1200 and/or 1630 to Sunset)
2 survey rounds for detecting active nesting
- d. Period 4: April 21 – June 10 (anytime, may be replaced by preconstruction survey)
1 survey round for detecting active nesting – most hawks should be established nesting by this period.
- e. Period 5: June 10 – July 30 (known nests only; Sunrise to 1200 and/or 1600 to Sunset)
1 survey round to observe post-fledging success or failure

4. Survey Timing: Preconstruction-level

- a. Preconstruction – 1 survey 15 days prior to any project work including vegetation removal.
- b. If active construction lapses for more than 15 days, another preconstruction survey for SWHA activity is required.

5. Methodology – CDFW 2000

Surveys should be conducted in a manner that maximizes the potential to observe the adult Swainson's hawks, as well as the nest/chicks second.

- a. Minimum Equipment: Minimum survey equipment includes a high-quality pair of binoculars and a high-quality spotting scope. Surveying even the smallest project area will take hours, and poor optics often result in eye-strain and difficulty distinguishing details in vegetation and subject birds. Other equipment includes good maps, GPS units, flagging, and notebooks.
- b. Walking vs Driving: Driving (car or boat) or “windshield surveys” are usually preferred to walking if an adequate roadway is available through or around the project site. While driving, the observer can typically approach much closer to a hawk without causing it to fly. Although it might appear that a flying bird is more visible, they often fly away from the observer using trees as screens; and it is difficult to determine from where a flying bird came. Walking surveys are useful in locating a nest after a nest territory is identified, or when driving is not an option.
- c. Angle and Distance to the Tree: Surveying subject trees from multiple angles will greatly increase the observer's chance of detecting a nest or hawk, especially after trees are fully leafed and when

surveying multiple trees in close proximity. When surveying from an access road, survey in both directions. Maintaining a distance of 50 meters to 200 meters from subject trees is optimal for observing perched and flying hawks without greatly reducing the chance of detecting a nest/young: Once a nesting territory is identified, a closer inspection may be required to locate the nest.

- d. Speed: Travel at a speed that allows for a thorough inspection of a potential nest site. Survey speeds should not exceed 5 miles per hour to the greatest extent possible. If the surveyor must travel faster than 5 miles per hour, stop frequently to scan subject trees.
- e. Visual and Aural Ques: Surveys will be focused on both observations and vocalizations. Observations of nests, perched adults, displaying adults, and chicks during the nesting season are all indicators of nesting Swainson's hawks. In addition, vocalizations are extremely helpful in locating nesting territories. Vocal communication between hawks is frequent during territorial displays; during courtship and mating; through the nesting period as mates notify each other that food is available or that a threat exists; and as older chicks and fledglings beg for food.
- f. Distractions: Minimize distractions while surveying. Although two pairs of eyes may be better than one pair at times, conversation may limit focus. Radios should be off, not only are they distracting, they may cover a hawk's call.

6. Data Collection

- a. Record the location of all nests using GPS in the field. Note nest status, individual sightings, and behavior patterns. Report both the spatial data and survey notes to the PCA.
- b. CNDDDB data forms should be submitted to CA Department of Fish and Wildlife for all positive IDs as well.

7. Reporting and Buffers

- a. Provide the results of each survey round to the PCA once completed. The results may be grouped into a single report if no activity or nests are detected. Once a SWHA is present, the PCA must be notified immediately.
- b. In accordance with HCP/NCCP Swainson's Hawk 1 (section 6.3.5.6.2), all active SWHA nests will be given a 1,320 ft buffer during the nesting season. As described in Swainson's Hawk 1, project applicants may apply to the PCA for a reduction in the buffer distance.

8. Construction Monitoring

All active nests will require construction monitoring to ensure no activity within the buffer zone (see HCP/NCCP Swainson's Hawk 2, Section 6.3.5.6.3). Frequency of monitoring will be approved by the PCA and based on frequency and intensity of construction activities. The PCA will consult with agencies on level of monitoring and frequency that results in the least disturbance to the nest while gauging project activities.

This document is intended as a guidance document that was developed in coordination with the USFWS and CDFW. Survey guidelines may change so please check the PCCP website for the most current version.